

In some parts of Germany it is commonly believed that whatever is undertaken when the moon is on the increase succeeds well, and that the full moon brings everything to perfection ; whereas business undertaken in the wane of the moon is doomed to failure.¹ This German belief has come down, as we might have anticipated, from barbaric times ; for Tacitus tells us that the Germans considered the new or the full moon the most auspicious time for business ;² and Caesar informs us that the Germans despaired of victory if they joined battle before the new moon.³ The Spartans seem to have been of the same opinion, for it was a rule with them never to march out to war except when the moon was full. The rule prevented them from sending troops in time to fight the Persians at Marathon,⁴ and but for Athenian valour this paltry superstition might have turned the scale of battle and decided the destiny of Greece, if not of Europe, for centuries. The Athenians themselves paid dear for a similar scruple: an eclipse of the moon cost them the loss of a gallant fleet and army before Syracuse, and practically sealed the fate of Athens, for she never recovered from the blow.⁵ So heavy is the sacrifice which superstition demands of its votaries. In this respect the Greeks were on a level with the negroes of the Sudan, among whom, if a march has been decided upon during the last quarter of the moon, the departure is always deferred until the first day of the new moon. No chief would dare to undertake an

expedition and lead out his warriors before the appearance of the crescent. - Merchants and private persons observe the same rule on their journeys.⁶ In like manner the Mandingoes of Senegambia pay great attention to the changes of the moon, and think it very unlucky to begin a journey or any other work of consequence in the last quarter.⁷ It is especially the appearance of the new moon, with

Statistical Account of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1791-1799), xii. 457. ⁵ Thucydides, vii. 50.

¹ A. Kuhn und W. Schwartz, *Nord-Binger, Du Niger* ⁶ Le capitaine

deutsche Sagen Marcken und Gchrduche ait- Golfe de Guinfe (Paris, 1892), ii.

(Leipsic, 1848), p. 457, § 419. 116.

² Tacitus, *Germanza*, II. ⁷ Mungo Park, *Travels in the*

³ Caesar, *De bello Gallzco*, i. 50. *Interior Districts of Africa*** (London,

⁴ Herodotus, vi. 106 ; Lucian, *De* 1807), pp. 406^.